

HIGHLIGHTS BARSTOW FIELD OFFICE

**California Desert District
Advisory Council Meeting
September 2014**

Amargosa Vole Demographic and Disease Study – Habitat Enhancement Program

BLM Action: In 2011, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducted a preliminary study to determine the current distribution of the Amargosa vole in the Tecopa area. A multi-year study is being conducted to further determine the extent of disease, vole genetics, and vole habitat needs. These studies have and will continue to provide information to guide management actions to help prevent the extinction of this highly vulnerable species.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office (BFO), California Desert District Office, California State Office and Washington Office
CDFW
US Geological Service (USGS)
UC Davis
UC Berkley
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Inyo County

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: Recent results for the trapping efforts indicate that the Amargosa vole has approximately a 10% chance of being extirpated in the next year, and this rises to a probability of approximately 82% within the next 5 years if immediate management action is not taken. In response to the precarious nature of the Amargosa vole, the Amargosa Vole Team was chartered through the Desert Managers Group (DMG) in April 2013. The purpose of the Amargosa Vole Team (AVT) is to function as a work group to the DMG to provide a collaborative forum for BLM, USFWS, CDFW, and researchers to plan, coordinate, and implement actions that would prevent the extinction of the vole and ultimately result in its' recovery. Chris Otahal is co-chair of the AVT along with Russ Scofield from the Desert Managers Group. Due to the extreme vulnerability of this wetland species to extinction, it has become a discussion point in both State and Federal Drought team reports. At the Wildlife Society Meeting on January 27, 2015, Chris Otahal will be making a presentation, and will participate as a panel member discussing BLM's role in managing the Amargosa vole and other biological resources associated with the Amargosa River.

The BFO in partnership with UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and USGS secured a \$25,000 NLCS Research Support Program grant to support Amargosa vole conservation efforts. The funding will support a pilot translocation project from a sustainable source

subpopulation into nearby marshes using a soft-release approach with monitoring to track animal movement, population size, disease, genetic structure, and impacts of predators and competitors prior to, during and post translocation efforts. Twenty Amargosa voles were captured and fitted with radio transmitters in July 2014. Half were left in place at the site of capture, half were moved to a marsh patch remote from the site of capture. These individuals were intensively tracked and monitored. Results will be provided in a forthcoming report (tracking data is still being collected at the time of this writing).

Also, as part of the NLCS Research Support Program grant, a study has been initiated by BLM and its' partners to help determine the best way to manage bulrush habitat in the marshes associated with the Amargosa vole. Data is currently being collected, but early results helped guide actions regarding the implementation of management actions being carried out at Marsh #1 (see below).

UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and USGS, with support from the BFO successfully secured a Section 6 Grant to provide funding for Amargosa vole habitat creation on private lands in Shoshone (a location where voles were found historically but are now extirpated) and research into a potential captive breeding program for the vole. The BFO recently conducted a field visit to the proposed site to work with partners to set the permitting groundwork for this proposed project.

The BFO is also moving forward on a small habitat enhancement project to help secure and expand existing vole habitat in the "borehole" area in Tecopa. BLM worked with the CDFW and Inyo County to install a standpipe structure to prevent drawdown in water levels and degradation of vole habitat in this marsh. This action helped provide security of this population while the AVT finalizes design and permitting needs associated with installing a permanent check-dam to allow for long-term management of the site (check-dam funding of \$50,000 is a directed allocation from the BLM Washington Office). Recent efforts have resulted in the re-watering of a small portion of the "borehole" and it is hoped this will start the habitat recovery process.

As reported previously, UC Davis established a small breeding colony of Owens Valley voles to help determine the feasibility of a captive breeding program for the Amargosa vole in case this option becomes necessary. UC Davis is using the Owens Valley vole as a surrogate for the Amargosa vole to work out techniques for vole propagation in captivity. This project is currently winding down and the team has moved on to applying experience gained from these efforts to the captive Amargosa vole phase discussed below.

UC Davis has also initiated a predator study for the marshes used by the Amargosa vole. The researchers have established several photographic "trap" sites which are documenting the predators using the area. The researchers are also keeping visual records of predators on site. In a related action, the USFWS has provided a \$75,000 grant to USGS to continue habitat studies at Marsh #1 and to start conducting a predator exclosure study to determine effects of predation on voles.

In response to continuing detrition of one of the main habitat patches for the vole, the State Office provided \$42,000 in directed funding to initiate an “emergency rescue” program to establish a breeding colony of voles in captivity at UC Davis. The money will provide operational funds for three or more years. As of the writing of this report, 20 animals have been brought into this facility and all are doing well. Animals bred in captivity will ultimately be released back into the wild to supplement natural populations as appropriate and act as an insurance population against extinction in the wild.

The BFO is currently working with the BLM State Office to secure additional funding to expand the earlier genetics work to support the captive breeding program, expand the vegetation (bulrush) studies to better understand how to restore marsh habitat, and learn other critical information regarding the Amargosa vole.

The USGS team is preparing a report for BLM summarizing the demographic work to date (draft has been received) and is working on two journal manuscripts. The USGS team has informed BLM that their article on vole habitat needs has been accepted by the journal *Global Ecology & Conservation*. Principal Investigators Dr. Janet Foley and Dr. Robert Klinger recently made a scientific presentation at the CDFW Conservation Lecture Series summarizing the research to date on the vole. This presentation was recorded and is available on the web via YouTube. As a result efforts spearheaded by our partners at USGS (Dr. Rob Klinger), the Western Section of the Wildlife Society has agreed to devote an entire day-long Session to discussing the results of these various studies at their annual meeting in Santa Rosa, California, on January 27, 2015.

Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions

BLM Action: The BFO is involved in various monitoring studies / management actions associated with the implementation of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Management Plan including:

- 1) Amargosa Niterwort Population Monitoring
- 2) Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program
- 3) Tamarisk Control Efforts
- 4) SCAN Monitoring
- 5) Fish Monitoring

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office
BLM, California State Office
Amargosa Conservancy
The Nature Conservancy
Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO)
US Geological Survey
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
UC Davis
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The list above represents a summary of the various management studies / management actions which are being carried out in support of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Plan. These projects are multi-year and BLM is currently working with partners to secure out-year funding for these programs.

The Ventura USFWS Office secured a \$162,000 grant through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Federal Endangered Species Act Traditional Section 6 Program to support the Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program for the 2013 and 2014 field seasons and provide funding to produce a multi-year summary report of the program to date. The Amargosa Conservancy secured funding to expand monitoring to include Willow Creek for the 2014 effort – this is an area which had not been covered under previous survey efforts. The Nature Conservancy, Amargosa Conservancy and PRBO, in coordination with BLM, recently submitted a Neotropical Bird Grant application which would expand upon our ongoing tamarisk removal and bird monitoring program to include monitoring of Willow Creek and fund focused surveys for Yellow-billed Cuckoo along Willow Creek. Bird surveys have been completed for the 2014 season, and a report from PRBO will be forthcoming.

Through a partnership with USFWS, the Barstow Field Office secured a \$35,712 grant through the USFWS's Desert Fish Habitat Partnership Program (DFHP) to support Phase 1 (2013-2014) of the Tamarisk Removal/Habitat Enhancement program targeting habitat improvements for the Amargosa speckled dace and Amargosa pupfish (this funding includes support for on-going fish monitoring as well as habitat improvement). There have been some implementation timing issues and the DFHP committee has agreed to extend the grant period to cover the Phase 2 portion (2014-2015) of this project. The BLM California State Office provided additional fisheries funding in FY 2014 to conduct one mile of fish surveys on the Amargosa River. This will provide follow-up data to the baseline surveys carried out in 2010. Field work and surveys by USGS are anticipated to begin in September 2014. BFO is currently working with the State Office to secure directed funding in FY 2015 (\$40,000) to expand fish surveys to encompass an additional four miles of the Amargosa River.

An article written by Chris Otahal appeared in the River Management Society's Spring 2014 Journal which discusses the results of the tamarisk removal/cowbird management program on sensitive bird species in the Amargosa River ACEC/WSR. The results from the bird and fish work will also be presented at the Western Section of the Wildlife Society meeting discussed previously.

The BLM State office is gearing up for the fourth consecutive annual survey of Amargosa Niterwort in September 2014.

Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities

BLM Action: The BFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the USFWS to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BFO is providing representation for

the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

Agency: BLM
USFWS
Various County, State and Federal Agencies

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: In December 2012 there was a multi-agency meeting in which the ground work for the production of the Recovery Action Plan was discussed. The Recovery Action Plan (v.1) was provided in March 2013 for initial RIT and management review. BFO staff attended a Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) meeting in Las Vegas on March 11, 2014. The primary focus of this meeting was updating managers on RIT efforts undertaken to date and for managers to discuss the direction and next steps for the RITs.

On July 1, 2014, a RIT WebEx was conducted with BLM Wildlife Biologists Larry LaPre and Chris Otahal in attendance. There was some discussion regarding the next steps on producing Version 2 of the West Mojave Implementation Plan – in particular on how to move forward on revisions based on “dissenting” opinions on priority action items. There was also discussion on how to effectively track desert tortoise conservation actions as they are implemented by the various participating groups.

The Desert Tortoise Recovery Office solicited the development of proposals for implementing high priority action tasks outlined in the Implementation Plan. BFO submitted a proposal for route signing and restoration which would assist with the recovery of the Desert Tortoise as well as help implement conservation actions for the Lane Mountain Milkvetch. BFO also provided feedback regarding the “dissenting” opinions issue.

Silurian Valley Wind and Solar Facilities

BLM Action: Processing two separate applications filed by Iberdrola Renewables:

1) A 200 MW wind farm (67-133 turbines) including a new project substation with an overhead 287 kV transmission line involving 15,849 acres of public lands. Key issues are visual landscape, impacts to historic trail and railroad, golden eagles and Department of Defense flight corridor (HRIZ). Project is required to comply with the Bald and Golden Eagle Act.

2) A 150 MW solar PV project, including a new project substation with an overhead 1.5 mile 287 kV interconnection line on 7,218 acres of public lands. Solar proposal lies within a variance area per the Solar PEIS Record of Decision (ROD). A Solar Variance determination is required by the Solar PEIS; requires BLM National Director’s concurrence to process further.

Both projects propose potentially connecting into the LADWP Mead-Victorville 287kV line (Boulder corridor). Project Feasibility, System Impact and Facility studies for both projects have not been completed – interconnections are unconfirmed. Proposed projects would be located 10 miles north of Baker, CA and east of State Scenic Highway 127 (between Silurian Dry Lake and the historic Boulder Utility Corridor).

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office and California Desert District
National Park Service (NPS), Death Valley National Park and Mojave National Preserve
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Pacific Region and Ventura Office
State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Department of Defense (DOD)
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

Contacts: Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office
Jeff Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

Status: **Wind:** Revised Plan of Development (POD) received and deemed adequate to complete the application. Application has been forwarded to the California Desert District RECO for environmental processing. Local DOD coordination office advises reevaluation has deemed site to be within a High Risk Impact Zone (HRIZ) to the R-2508 flight corridor. Project area is transected by the National Historic Old Spanish Trail and historic Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad; historic visual landscape and cultural concerns; potential golden eagle and avian corridor concerns; and concerns have been raised by NPS, USFWS, Tribes and California SHPO. The Applicant has requested the project remain in pre-application status until a decision on the variance for the solar project is complete.

Solar: The proposed project location lies within a Solar PEIS variance area which requires two meetings with government entities and a public meeting. Filing requires BLM California State Director determination if processing application is warranted per Solar PEIS Record of Decision. The BLM California State Director may choose to deny application or, must acquire BLM National Director's concurrence to proceed with processing. The BLM National Director may agree to process or can deny application.

Pre-application meetings with BLM and government agencies have been completed. SHPO, NPS, USFWS, CDFW and Tribal concerns received. Public comments voice high concerns over visual and historic landscape impacts. BLM has requested various cultural/archaeological field studies and Ethnographic literature review to adequately consider the effects of the solar proposal to render a variance determination. Applicant decided not to provide studies and requested determination on application.

BLM's decision on the variance application is pending.

North Peak Wind Farm

BLM Action: EON Climate and Renewables, Inc. filed an application for a 120 MW wind farm. This

proposed project consists of up to 42 wind turbines, access roads, an off-site operations office, and a project substation with a 220kV interconnection line to the SCE Desert View Substation. Location borders the Towns of Apple Valley and Lucerne Valley, San Bernardino National Forest, Juniper Flats and the OMYA Mine.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
County of San Bernardino
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

Contact: Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office
Frank McMenimen, Project Manager, Palms Springs/South Coast Office

Status: A revised Plan of Development was received and deemed complete. Meetings with BLM and other Federal, State and local agencies have been completed. Concerns include cultural, visual landscape, eagles and wildland urban interface. Application is on hold at the request of applicant. Applicant must reply by October 28, 2015 with decision to proceed or withdraw. Additional time requested by EON to consider alternative interconnection for gen-tie connection. North Peak is no longer listed on SCE queue for interconnection of projects.

There is considerable public opposition to this proposed project, including local residents and the San Bernardino County Supervisors.

Soda Mountain Solar Project

BLM Action: The BLM received a right-of-way (ROW) application from Soda Mountain Solar, LLC to construct, operate, maintain and decommission a solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant facility along with the necessary ancillary facilities. The project is proposed on 4,397 acres with the solar field occupying approximately 2,691 acres. The project is located along Interstate 15 (I-15), South of Blue Bell Mine Road, about 6 miles southwest of Baker, California, and 52 miles northeast of Barstow, California. More specifically the project would include solar array fields; access roads; collector lines; a substation with switchyard and interconnection; ancillary buildings; groundwater production, test, and observation water wells; water tanks; a water treatment and storage facility; brine ponds; warehouses; fencing; berms; other infrastructure; and laydown areas. The project would be accessed by the existing Razor and Blue Bell Mine roads. New internal roads would be constructed among collector lines, substation, arrays and sub arrays, and other ancillary facilities. The interconnection to the proposed substation and collector lines from the arrays would be via underground trench, including underground trenching of I-15.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
County of San Bernardino
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

Contact: Jeffery Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

Status: A Draft Environmental Impact Study was released in November 2014. The BLM and the County are drafting the Final Environmental Impact Study (EIS) and Report (EIR). The applicant is currently drilling test wells to determine the groundwater suitability of the area. A Final EIS/EIR is expected to be issued this winter.

Coolwater Lugo Transmission Line Project

BLM Action: Southern California Edison Company (SCE) is proposing a new high-voltage (220/500-kV) transmission line extending approximately 64 miles from SCE's existing Coolwater Generation Station Switchyard located in Daggett, California, to SCE's existing Lugo Substation in Hesperia, California. The proposed Coolwater to Lugo Transmission Line Project (CLTP) would traverse approximately 16 miles of public lands managed by the BLM, with the remainder on private or other lands within San Bernardino County. Approximately 47 miles of the transmission line would parallel or be within existing overhead utility rights-of-way (ROWs) and designated transmission corridors with the remaining 17 miles requiring a plan amendment to designate a new transmission line corridor. The proposed project also includes new substation facilities to support transmission line termination and new telecommunication facilities for a Special Protection System to maintain transmission system reliability. The new 500/220/115/12-kV Desert View Substation, which would initially be constructed as a switching station, is southeast of the Town of Apple Valley, CA. The new telecommunications lines would extend from the Gale Substation to Pisgah Substation and from the new Desert View Substation to the Apple Valley Substation, traversing approximately 6 miles of BLM-managed lands. The majority of the telecommunications fiber optic cable would be installed on existing poles. The project would include installation of approximately 373 new single and double-circuit 220-kV and 500-kV transmission structures, and removal of approximately 168 structures associated with the existing Lugo-Pisgah 220-kV transmission lines No. 1 and No. 2; construction of 25 miles of new roads; upgrades to 17 miles of roads; temporary use and construction areas; and approximately 215 setup areas for conductor pulling and splicing.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office
California Public Utilities Commission
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
County of San Bernardino
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

Contact: Jeffery Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

Status: The Scoping period closed in early September and the agencies are working on alternatives and analysis for the project. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report are expected to be issued this winter.

Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise Proposed Withdrawal

BLM Action: The BLM filed a withdrawal application for 10,094.03 acres of public lands located in San Bernardino County, California. The proposed withdrawal is for the protection of two botanical conservation areas known as Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise. The Lane Mountain Milkvetch is a federally listed endangered species found in these conservation areas, and has a limited geographical range.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Ventura Office

Contact: Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist, Barstow Field Office
Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office
Liz Easley, Lead Realty Specialist, California State Office

Status: On August 27, 2014 a Federal Register Notice (FRN) was published which temporarily segregates 10,094.03 acres of public lands from location and entry under the mining law, subject to valid existing rights, for two years. The FRN also announced the 90-day public comment period on the proposed withdrawal application.

A public meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 14, 2014 at the BLM Barstow Field Office from 6 pm to 8 pm. Written comments on the proposed withdrawal application may be sent to the attention of the Field Manager, Katrina Symons, by US mail to 2601 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311 or email at blm_ca_coolgardie_mesa_withdrawal@blm.gov. Written comments must be received on or before November 25, 2014.

California Historic Route 66

BLM Action: Barstow to Needles Corridor Management Plan (CMP)

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office, Needles Field Office, and California Desert District Office

Contact: Doran Sanchez, Partnership Outreach/Development Specialist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The BLM, California Historic Route 66 Association (CHR66A), and third party contractor Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, are preparing a CMP for the segment of the historic Route 66 within the BLM California Desert District that extends from the western city limits of Barstow, California to five miles east of Needles, California. CMP information is available at <http://www.route66ca.org> and the BLM Barstow and Needles Field Office websites.

The CHR66A, Lardner-Klein and CDD CMP core team members conduct weekly strategy calls to exchange information, plan briefings with elected officials and key constituent groups, and identify any data/research needed for the CMP. The core team facilitated by Lardner/Klein has held three of four scheduled webcasts to continue soliciting public comments on preparation of the CMP. Names, addresses and emails of the DAC, local tribes and key stakeholders were provided to Lardner-Klein, who in

coordination with the CHR66A and the BLM, provide ongoing outreach to notify the public of the webcasts, which address specific topics:

April 28, 2014: Route 66's Intrinsic Qualities and their Stewardship

May 22, 2014: Visitor Experience

August 28, 2014: Transportation

October 30, 2014: Marketing and Heritage Tourism Development.

The CHR66A and Lardner-Klein formed an Ad Hoc Committee to develop strategies to maximize outreach and effectiveness of the web-based meetings. The Committee includes representatives from each of the communities, organizations, agencies, and individuals who expressed interest in participating on the committee during the public scoping meetings.

As a result of pre-webcast networking, the web meetings have been very successful. A draft CMP is tentatively scheduled for release in early spring 2015, and a final in late spring 2015. Once completed, the BLM and CHR66A will seek a national scenic byway designation for this segment of the Route.

Note: In addition to supporting the CMP, the BLM has written two Route 66 brochures (a national overview and a California-specific publication), which will be available on BLM websites shortly. Since the dedication of the BLM's Route 66 Gateway turnout/interpretive kiosk at the 5 Mile Exit off Interstate 40 on Friday, May 9, 2014, hundreds of national and international Route 66 travelers have signed the 5 Mile journal, with very positive comments and support.

Congressionally Designated Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Area

BLM Action: Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office and California Desert District Office
Department of Navy, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)

Contact: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

Status: The BLM continues to work cooperatively with the MCAGCC, Twentynine Palms, California to implement Public Law 113-66.

The Resource Management Group Charter was finalized in June 2014. Public meetings and field trips have been held on May 7 (Yucca Valley Community Center), August 16 (Lucerne Valley Community Center) and September 6 (field trip to proposed company objective areas). The meetings and field trip held to date were to inform the public of the changes in land use, as well as solicit input from relevant State agencies, off-highway vehicle interest groups, event managers, environmental advocacy groups and other interested parties.

The MCAGCC does not plan to conduct military training in the Shared Use Area (SUA) in FY 2015 so BLM is proceeding with the processing of special recreation permits for

events proposed within the SUA. Additionally, boundary signs are being installed along the SUA/Exclusive Military Use Area interface.

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: October 1, 2013 to September 12, 2014.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office

Contact: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

Status: From October 1, 2013 to September 12, 2014 a total of 149 Special Recreation Permits (SRP) have been administered by the Barstow Field Office, with several of the SRPs being multi-event and multi-day. The SRP that had the largest attendance was King of the Hammers in February 2014 which had an estimated 45,000 spectators.

Film Permits (Commercial and Non-Commercial)

BLM Action: October 1, 2013 to September 12, 2014

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office

Contact: Timothy Hough, Outdoor Recreation Planner Intern, Barstow Field Office
Cecilia Franklin, Volunteer Coordinator, Barstow Field Office

Status: From October 1, 2013 to February 28, 2014, a total of 153 film permits have been administered by the Barstow Field Office. This consisted of 146 commercial film permits and 7 letters of authorization for non-commercial filming projects to students enrolled in a university related to the filming industry that must complete a class assignment. The most popular shoot locations included El Mirage, Johnson Valley, and Dumont Dunes.

Mining - Locatable Minerals

BLM Action: New Deal Mine Plan of Operation (CAMC-299435)

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The proponent submitted a Plan of Operation to conduct mineral exploration in T7N, R1W, Section 12, SBM, near Lucerne Valley, California. An environmental assessment was issued on August 29, 2014 with a 30-day public comment period.